

The Hope of Israel

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Date: 13 October 2024

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- [0 : 0 0] We're going to turn now to our Bible reading for this evening, and we are in the book of Genesis. We have plenty of visitor Bibles at the side, at the back, so please do grab a Bible if you need one.
- And we're in Genesis chapter 35, and that's page 29, if you have a visitor Bible. So Genesis 35, and beginning there at verse 1.
- God said to Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there. Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau.
- So Jacob said to his household and to all who are with him, put away the foreign gods that are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your garments.
- Then let us arise and go up to Bethel, so that I may make there an altar to the God who answers me in the day of my distress, and has been with me wherever I've gone.
- [1 : 1 3] So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears. Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree that was in Shechem.
- And as they journeyed, a terror from God fell upon the cities that were around them, so that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. And Jacob came to Lutz, that is, Bethel, which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him.
- And there he built an altar, and called the place El Bethel, because there God had revealed himself to him when he fled from his brother. And Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried under an oak below Bethel.
- So he called its name Alon-Bakoth. God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Paddan Aram, and blessed him.
- And God said to him, Your name is Jacob. No longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name. So he called his name Israel.
- [2 : 2 7] And God said to him, I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body.
- The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give to you. And I will give the land to your offspring after you. Then God went up from him in the place where he had spoken with him.
- And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he had spoken with him, a pillar of stone. He poured out a drink offering on it and poured oil on it. So Jacob called the name of the place where God had spoken with him, Bethel.
- Then they journeyed from Bethel. When they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel went into labor. And she had hard labor.
- And when her labor was at its hardest, the midwife said to her, Do not fear, for you have another son. And as her soul was departing, for she was dying, she called his name Ben-on-i.
- [3 : 3 6] But his father called him Benjamin. So Rachel died. And she was buried on the way to Ephrath, that is Bethlehem. And Jacob set up a pillar over her tomb.

It is the pillar of Rachel's tomb, which is there to this day. Israel journeyed on and pitched his tent beyond the Tower of Edah.

While Israel lived in that land, Reuben went and lay with Bilhah, his father's father's spine, and Israel heard of it. Now the sons of Jacob were twelve.

The sons of Leah, Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. The sons of Rachel, Joseph, and Benjamin. The sons of Bilhah, Rachel's servant, Dan, and Nathali.

The sons of Zilpah, Leah's servant, Gad, and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob, who were born to him in Paddan Aram. And Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kiriath Arba, that is Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac had sojourned.

[4 : 48] Now the days of Isaac were one hundred and eighty years. And Isaac breathed his last, and he died, and was gathered to his people, old and full of days.

And the sons Esau and Jacob buried him. Amen. May God bless his word to us.

Return, if you would, to Genesis 35. In a chapter that may feel like it's made up of rather odds and ends, but actually is a chapter full of great hope.

Genesis 35 brings us to the denouement of the eighth book of generations, the eighth of the ten book of generations that makes up Genesis. It began back in chapter 25, verse 19, the generations of Isaac.

And it focuses on Jacob's journey through life. And if you remember, it began there with the oracle about the two nations that are promised to Rebekah through her twin pregnancies.

[6 : 02] And what we see here, of course, is that oracle being fulfilled. At the end of chapter 25 here, lists twelve sons, the founders of the twelve tribes of Israel. Now complete with Benjamin's birth.

And then, of course, in chapter 36, you have Esau's sons who give rise to the nation of Edom. And again, notably, the story is one of another account of travail in childbirth.

And there's a deliberate echo there of chapter 25. And what we see is Jacob's story also coming full circle. There are repeated references, you notice here, to Bethel that we've just sung about.

Jacob's journey out of the land was marked by God appearing to him wonderfully at Bethel. And here we are back again in the land. And the promises that God made to him then in Genesis 28 are all being fulfilled completely.

He's back in the land. He's got abundant offspring. And if you notice, after verse 21 here, after verse, after Benjamin's birth, the twelfth son, you see, Jacob, for the first time in the narrative, is actually named Israel.

[7 : 15] God had changed his name many years ago to Israel. But here, verse 21, Israel journeyed on, not Jacob journeyed on. Verse 22, Israel lived in the land.

And so you see, in this chapter, the camera is zooming right back out again to the bigger picture, the unfolding plan of God for the whole world through his people Israel.

That's what Genesis is about. It's not just about the lives of the patriarchs, but it's about God's promise that goes way, way back, right to Eden. Crystallized later then in the promise to Abraham about his seed.

How the seed of the woman promised at the beginning would at last crush the serpent, reverse the terrible curse on humankind. That's the big story.

Where's the story got to here? Well, there were high points, weren't there, in Abraham's story, but since then, it's rather been downhill. And certainly in the last chapter that we read together, chapter 34, we seem to have reached rock bottom with the dreadful events of Jacob's dysfunctional family.

[8 : 23] This is the family we're reading about that the Apostle Paul later tells us, the family who were entrusted with the very oracles of God. And yet so often, they proved such a letdown, so unfaithful.

So will their unfaithfulness not nullify the faithfulness of God, asks Paul. Has God rejected his people? Can he keep faith with the kind of people that we were reading about last time in Genesis 34?

Can God keep faith for someone like me? Or you? We might find ourselves asking that, mightn't we, after reviewing the recent chapters of our own lives, perhaps?

Which might be full of shame. Might be giving us very heavy consciences. Well, to exactly that kind of agonized question, of course, the Apostle Paul's emphatic answer is, no, God has not rejected his people.

Because his plan is not based upon their works, but upon his extraordinary grace. And Moses' answer here in chapter 35 really is exactly the same as he writes to his people of Israel years later.

[9 : 37] And of course, writes also to us. It's exactly the same. And as Jacob's story comes to a close here, before the main focus moves on to his sons, and particularly to the son Joseph in the last chapters of the book, he points us here in this chapter afresh to the grace of salvation, despite all the grimness of their sin.

And he also heartens us with a delightful glimmering of the future, of a Savior to fill us with hope. So if anyone here tonight is thinking of themselves, perhaps God has rejected me, perhaps God has given up on me because of all the failures in my past, or maybe because of my failings right now in the present.

Well, friends, this is a wonderfully encouraging chapter for you, and indeed for all of us. And that's why it was written. Remember, the Apostle Paul tells us these things were written for us in the last days so that through the encouragement of these very scriptures, we might have hope.

Hope, that is, in the same hope, the hope of Israel. So let's look at the chapter in a bit of detail. First, verses 1 to 15 lay out for us a gracious renewal.

A gracious renewal of the covenant of salvation. Bethel is the place of renewal of both the covenant people and also the covenant promise. It was a place, as I said, of really hallowed associations for Jacob because God had met him there but encouraged him and commanded him even to return there.

[11 : 17] Not to live, but rather, as John Calvin puts it, so that a fresh view of the place might renew his faith in the ancient oracle and more fully confirm it. That's what these verses relate to us.

After the horrors of chapter 34, what we see here is a renewed people and a renewed promise from God for the future. Verses 1 to 7, they tell us of a people renewed through God's command of grace in the present.

Arise, he says, go to Bethel and make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau. By the way, notice how verse 1 and verse 7 bracket this little section the same way about the God who reveals himself in troubled times.

That's the God of Jacob. And God's call, you see, is a sovereign command. It's always, follow me. It's what Jesus said. The gospel's not a feeble offer.

God doesn't say to Jacob, Jacob, have a think about this and, you know, let me know your decision when you feel ready. No. Arise, he says, go. And verse 2 says, Jacob went obediently.

- [12 : 27] That is, he responds in faith. Faith in the Bible, you see, isn't some sort of vague leap into the dark. It's just the obedient response to the call of God. That's why the apostle talks about the obedience of faith and the disobedience of unbelief.

Real faith in the Bible is always tangible. It's real. It's a response to God's call. That's what you see here in verse 2. And it means, notice, a putting off and a putting away as well as a putting on.

You see, put away the foreign gods, all the idolatry, the trappings of paganism, all the things that had filtered into their thinking and their actions by far too close in association with the pagan world that caused the disaster in the last chapter.

Verse 4, they were hidden under this tree. Literally, you could read it, they were unceremoniously dumped. And it was signaled by an outward change of clothes, new garments that speak of an inward change of heart.

And Moses' readers would understand that perfectly. After their rebellion with the golden calf, do you remember? In Exodus, Moses destroyed all that idolatry and he reminded them to be as ruthless about it in the future whenever these temptations came to them.

- [13 : 47] Read about it in Deuteronomy chapter 7. And the cleansing and the putting on of new garments, that was also a familiar sign to them of repentance, of cleansing.

Of course, the signs themselves were meaningless unless they signified something real, a heart attitude that was changed within. Real change, that is, putting away disobedience and putting on the garments of obedience.

And that is always what biblical faith means. Real repentance is seen in intangible real fruit. That's what John the Baptist declared. Remember, bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

It's what Jesus constantly spoke of. It's what Paul, the apostles, constantly spoke of. Put to death whatever is earthly in you. Put them all away and instead put on the new ways of your life in Christ, the life of faith.

Real repentance and faith. Real response to God's grace is always evident in its fruit. In a visible and real renewal of spiritual life.

- [14 : 56] And it always bears fruit, therefore, in a real assurance. Do you see how Jacob in his obedient response is so very conscious now of God's presence? Verse 3, the God who answers me in my day of distress.

And his very real protection, verse 5, in the terror of God that was restraining his enemies. When we walk with the Lord in the light of his word, what a glory he does indeed shed on our way.

We are kept as we trust and obey. That's what Jacob found. See, God's grace is never cheap grace. It's covenant grace.

It demands covenant loyalty. You can't have assurance assurance of your salvation, assurance of God's presence and protection in our lives except by faith.

And real faith is obedient faith. And Jacob's reminded of that here, you see, after the disasters of chapter 34, just as Abraham was reminded of these things in Genesis 17 after his lapse in Genesis 16 that led to the birth of Ishmael.

- [16 : 05] What did God say to him? Walk before me, Abraham, and be blameless and I will confirm my covenant with you. Because God must have undivided loyalty from those that he calls to be his own.

If anyone loves me, said Jesus, he will keep my word and the Father and I will come and make our home with him. You see, that was such an important lesson here for Jacob to learn and for Moses traveling Israelites to learn.

So important for us to learn. See, sometimes we might think when we can complain, I don't, I just don't feel God's presence with me. Or I don't have assurance that it doesn't seem to be that light on my path.

And if that's the case, maybe what we need to be asking ourselves is, well, am I really trusting God? In other words, am I really obeying God's commands for my life? We sometimes fear God's commands, don't we?

We shrink from them. As if God's commands were going to harm us and make us miserable. That was the story in the Garden of Eden. Oh, don't listen to God's command.

[17 : 20] He wants to ruin your life. That's how human hearts have been ever since. But it's the opposite of that. God's commandment is life itself. It's in obedience to him that we find the peace and the joy that we're longing for.

And that's what God is teaching Jacob here, you see. As he takes him back to basics, back to the beginning, back to Bethel. As if to say, Jacob, do you remember now everything I've done for you?

Do you remember how you committed yourself to me way back then at Bethel? And you made all those vows, Jacob. Do you remember them? But do you really love me? Do you really love me?

The God who changed your name, who's changed your whole destiny. Do you, Jacob? Just like Jesus, remember, later on with Simon Peter.

In a way, he took him back to basics in the same way, didn't he? After the resurrection on the beach at Galilee. Called him by his old name. Commanded him again and renewed him.

[18 : 26] Feed my sheep. And often the Lord has to take people, has to take us back to basics to start all over again. Because it's not just Jacob, is it?

It's not just Simon Peter who make a mess of their life of discipleship, is it? But you see, there is a way back to fulsome fellowship with the Lord.

As we learn again to trust and obey. What favor he shows, what joy he bestows on all who will trust and obey. That hymn's teaching us a real truth.

And that's the truth that Moses is showing his people here. God's command is the way to life. And in his call of grace comes that grace to respond.

And Jacob rediscovers here that the way of obedience is indeed the path of blessing. And that was Moses' constant message to his people. His commandment is life, he said to them.

[19 : 28] See, I'm setting before you life and good or death and evil. Now choose life. Loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice, holding fast to him because he is your life.

And that's what Jacob experiences here. For real. He discovers what every believer discovers when we submit ourselves to the command of God on our life.

He gives us more and more assurances of his grace. And verses 9 to 15 here you see tell of God's promise renewed to Jacob through a fresh pledge to him now about the future.

All of God's short-term promises to Jacob have been fulfilled. He's been with him wherever he went. He's brought him back safely to the land of promise. He's given him many sons. He's given him great property.

And now you see he reaffirms to him the great long-range promises for the future. His name is reaffirmed in verse 10. Israel with all the destiny that that contains.

[20 : 33] Verse 11 a multiplying of offspring. Not just you see one nation but a whole company of nations and kings from his own body. God's own mouth now you see confirms the blessing that his father Isaac had invoked on him all those years before and God says the God who has done all this already will still do all that is promised that's yet to be.

And he can do this notice verse 11 because this God is God almighty El Shaddai the all-sufficient God. That's the name that God revealed himself as to Abraham back in Genesis 15 when he confirmed his covenant with him.

what he's saying you see is what I have begun I will bring to completion because I am the all-sufficient God almighty. When it comes to the world of investments and your pension fund manager and so on they always have that caveat don't they?

Past performance is no guarantee of future returns. But you see when it comes to El Shaddai God almighty it is precisely past performance that is the guarantee of every future promise and the Bible reminds us that again and again and again he who began a good work in you will surely bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ is how Paul puts it to the Philippians.

And that's what God said to Jacob here that's what God is saying to us because he is all-sufficient. We're not but he is because our God is El Shaddai because our hope is the hope of Israel unshakable.

[22 : 21] It's so easy isn't it? So often for us on the hard road of faith it's so easy to forget that especially when disasters come to us especially when those disasters of our own making and they floor us and crush us.

But that's why the Lord takes us back week after week to the place of covenant renewal just as he did with Jacob to remind us of what is already done and remind us of the great guarantee of all that lies in the future.

He brings us together week by week here doesn't he? To this place of renewal where he renews us under his word together. He teaches us again and again in the way of obedient faith and in his command comes the grace that makes us heed him afresh and the assurance of real faith as we remember his covenant as we confess afresh that if God before us who can be against us?

He who didn't spare his own son says Paul but gave himself up for us how will he not also with him give us all things? all that he's promised to those who love him.

It's always the revelation of God's covenant word that gives birth to the response of real faith in our hearts that evokes real worship and obedient lives.

[23 : 53] And that's what we see here you see in verse 14 in Jacob's wholehearted response. He pours out his heart on the altar. He literally pours out his substance to God in a costly act of sacrifice.

And it's a wonderful climax really to this story of Jacob's troubled wanderings. This is how it should be. Here is a man demonstrating his total submission to his God.

And in many ways it's the high point of his whole story as he ascends to his destiny here as the father of a great nation the tribes of Israel. And yet of course even this great consecration to God doesn't remove all the struggle all the strife from his life far from it.

In fact the chapters that follow we're going to see are full of strife and heartbreak for Jacob. All kinds of misery in the family drama. In a sense at the time he's most consecrated to God the greatest sorrows are still to come upon him.

And that's something that the writer wants us to see here very clearly. And it explains really the makeup of the rest of this chapter because Jacob's story actually is far from over and the story of God's salvation is certainly far from over.

[25 : 10] In fact it's only just begun. And that's why we need this end of Jacob's story. And what we see here you see is not only a gracious renewal of the covenant of salvation but what we have here also at the same time is a grim reminder of the curse of sin.

Look at verses 16 to 29. That's what this is all about. Actually it's trailed in verse 8. Did you notice that funny verse in the middle of this section separating those two accounts of the return to Bethel and then God's revelation to Jacob.

Why in verse 8 there do we have this odd verse about the death death of Deborah the nurse of Jacob's mother Rebecca. We haven't heard anything about her since way back in Genesis 24.

Maybe she went with Jacob to Haran to look after him or maybe she when he came back to the land came and found him. We're not told any of that. What we are told is she died on Jacob's journey to Bethel.

And so despite all the joy of this covenant renewal the place of worship becomes also the place of weeping.

[26 : 26] Do you see? Bethel the house of God on earth was also called verse 8 Alon Bakuth the oak of weeping. And as I said this verse really trails the rest of the chapter because verse 16 to the end is overshadowed by constant grim reminders of the curse of sin and of the ultimate wage of sin which is death.

Death's dark shadow has not yet been put to flight. And so we just see here you see that despite a renewed people with a renewed promise these are still real people who face all the real problems of this present earthly pilgrimage in a life where sin and death is still casting a dark shadow.

You see how the text is shouting that to us. Every step of this journey is still overshadowed by reminders of the curse. There's verse 5 they journeyed to Bethel under God's gracious protection and all the joy of God's presence and it's real and it's wonderful and yet that worship was tinged with weeping for Jacob.

And no doubt Deborah's death was a reminder to him also of his mother who must have died during his time of exile he never would see her again. And then verse 16 say they journeyed from Bethel towards Ephrath towards Bethlehem and there you see the great joy of birth was overshadowed immediately by the jarring pain of bereavement.

The tragic death of Rachel of his beloved wife. And there's irony here of course because remember way back Rachel had prayed give me children or I die.

[28 : 22] And here she dies in childbirth. And yet there's also real tenderness isn't there? Verse 17 her prayer is answered God gives her the assurance of her son even while she's dying.

And there's real faith amid this grief. You see Jacob refuses to call the child Ben-Oni the son of sorrow verse 18 but calls him Ben-Yamin the son of my right hand the son of my strength.

There's faith looking to the future. It's very striking isn't it? The spiritual elation of Bethel very quickly becomes family tragedy.

The beauty of Bethel here is bounded by the bitterness of Bethlehem and all its gravestones. But that's the real world isn't it friends?

That's the real life of faith. It's even the reality of the Christian life. The house of God this place here is where we celebrate marriages and births and baptisms.

[29 : 31] That's also where we weep together isn't it? at funerals. And the Bible doesn't play let's pretend. It doesn't hide from reality. Quite the opposite.

It forces us to face up to the reality of our world under the curse of sin still. Look at verse 21. Israel journeyed on.

Another stage in the pilgrimage. And verses 21 to 26 tell of the fulfillment of God's wonderful promises to Jacob in the completeness of his progeny.

Twelve sons. The heads of what will become the twelve tribes of Israel. The complete people of God. Wonderful grace according to promise. And yet look at verse 22.

Even the blessings of sons is tainted here with the bitterness of shame. Reuben, Jacob's firstborn. Notice verse 23 how it's emphasized.

[30 : 29] His rightful heir, his firstborn commits incest with Jacob's wife. Whatever the reason, be it lust or perhaps more likely a deliberate rebellion against his father's authority.

Just as Absalom years later would do that against his father David. Whatever it was, it was a terrible, terrible perversion. It was full of shame. Every one of Moses hearers knew that for sure.

It's clearly outlawed repeatedly in the law. It's another grim reminder, isn't it, of the persistence, the all pervasiveness of sin so deep in the human heart.

And there aren't many reminders that cut so deep, are there, as that kind of family pain and unfaithfulness. And even verse 27, when at last, Jacob journeys on to reach his father's camp at Mamre, Hebron.

The great family reunion that we're told about there, what is it? It's a gathering around the grave. Verse 29, Isaac breathed his last and he died. Do you see how this is a banner over this whole chapter?

[31 : 50] Remember the curse of sin and death. It's still here. And yes, Jacob can look back on all kinds of fulfillment of God's promises.

In his protection, in his presence with him all through his life, and in his progeny, in his sons, and in this great place of promise where he lives, the land of Canaan.

God's promise is certainly being fulfilled and yet, as yet, it's only in part. Sin and death still reign.

sin. There's a stark tension, isn't there, between what is a present reality in his life and the future that God has promised, the permanent life, the life of peace and prosperity beyond the curse of sin.

When at last darkness is defeated and Eden restored, when at last death's dark shadows will be put to flight. And do you see how Moses is reminding his people all these years later, the time of the Exodus?

[32 : 55] And he's saying to them, look, the story isn't over yet. God's promise is being fulfilled. Your very existence here has the multitudes of Israel's evidence of that. But even now, there's more still to unfold.

Even when you enter the promised land, there's going to be sorrow as well as joy. The curse remains. You'll be struggling with sin and death will stalk your lives too. But don't give up trusting in the hope of Israel.

God's promise is being fulfilled. You can see that. It has been fulfilled and it's going to be fulfilled just as God said it would be. What he has begun will be brought to completion.

And the seed of the woman, the seed of Israel will at last crush the serpent and destroy the power of sin and death. It will happen. And in that hope we're redeemed.

He's teaching them. And when at last he comes, he will wipe away all tears and sin and the curse. All of that will be no more. Darkness and all the dark shadows will flee away.

[34 : 07] So keep looking forward. Keep trusting in this same promise, the hope of Israel. Our all sufficient God will do it. And Jesus himself said that, didn't he?

He said, Moses spoke about me. Moses' whole gospel pointed forward, telling people to trust in a Savior who would at last come and who will be the true hope of Israel, who will bring an end to sin, who will bring resurrection from the dead itself.

And that's where Jacob's hope lay, where Israel's hope, where all of our hope still is in the coming of that great Savior. God, I want you to see just as we come to a close here, how even here, way back in Genesis, and in this chapter, I made all these grim reminders of the curse of sin, how we see also like a jewel on a dark back cloth, we see a glimmering revelation of Christ the Savior.

Three glimmering hints in our text here, that together give us a glimpse, way back even then, of that greater fulfillment to come, the great fulfillment, and the end of the curse of sin and death forever.

And it's in the mention of a specific promise here, and a specific person, and a specific place. Do you see? First of all, do you notice verse 11, the promise of a king? Kings shall come from Jacob's loins, from his seed.

[35 : 36] That's a new promise to Jacob, God's never said it to him before, he did say it to his grandfather Abraham, Jacob would father a royal line. But which of his twelve sons will be that royal line and the seed of promise?

Reuben was the firstborn, verse 23 tells us, doesn't it? But his conduct here disqualified him, as indeed did the conduct of his second son and his third son, do you remember?

Simeon and Levi here, they were the ones who led that terrible, terrible attack in the last chapter. And Moses hearers knew that very well because they knew that on Jacob's deathbed when he blessed all his sons, he disqualified them.

You can read about it in Genesis 49. But they also knew that the next in line son after those three was Judah. And they knew that Judah had inherited that royal promise.

Listen to Jacob's blessing in Genesis 49. The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs.

[36 : 50] And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. A promise of kings. And a promise for Judah's royal line.

But when and how and where? In chapter 36, as we'll see in Esau's genealogy, we'll see that Edom had kings long before there were any kings in Israel.

In fact, if you read on into the book of Judges, you'll read that refrain again and again and again. There were no kings. There was no king in Israel. And as a result, there was chaos and mayhem. But then you read on, don't you, until the very end of that little lovely book of Ruth.

The wonderful story of that love between Boaz, the Ephrathite, by the way, from Bethlehem and Ruth. And how God's wonderful providence brought them together and gave them a son called Obed in the town of Bethlehem.

And the book ends by telling Obed fathered Jesse and Jesse fathered David. David, the great king, the Lord's anointed ruler, the savior of his people.

[37 : 58] And Bethlehem, the place of Jacob's grief here. Israel's grief becomes a place of Israel's great glory in the birth of that great king.

And yet, you read on in the story of David and beyond, and you'll see that even David couldn't save his people from the curse of sin and death, could he? Even he who did follow the Lord wholeheartedly, even he was a mere man, he was a sinner, sinner.

He was a great king. But he wasn't an all-sufficient savior. And after him, both the kings and the people failed so miserably that the whole nation had to be ejected from God's promised land.

And in Jeremiah 31, the prophet recalls the weeping here of Genesis 35 with an image of Rachel weeping from her grave near Bethlehem as she sees her children, her seed, the people of Israel being cast out of the land into captivity.

And it seemed like it was the end. And yet even there, there is hope. Jeremiah, the weeping prophet cries out, keep your voice from weeping, there is a hope for your future.

[39 : 16] I will comfort them and give gladness for sorrow, says the Lord. This story is not over yet. And the people of faith waited, longing, yearning, waiting for the consolation of Israel, waiting for the great redemption promised right from the very, very beginning but not yet seen.

Until at last when you turn over the very first page of the New Testament in Matthew's Gospel, you read another account that begins just like all the ten accounts in the book of Genesis.

These are the generations of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. And Matthew 2 actually in those first chapters recalls Rachel's death here and Jeremiah's quoting of those words.

As Jesus is born in a world overshadowed by sin and death amid the weeping of mothers again in Bethlehem whose little ones were massacred, you remember, by Herod in a desperate attempt to kill the holy seed, the child of God.

But that child, the offspring of Jacob, was God himself, El Shaddai, the all-sufficient, almighty in the flesh, come at last to accomplish what no mere man could ever do and to bear away the penalty of man's sin, to destroy the power of sin over the human heart, to disperse at last forever the gloomy clouds of night and death-dark shadows put to flight once and for all and forever.

[41 : 07] Paul the Apostle says he was delivered up to death for our trespasses and he was raised for our justification. salvation. And he says we therefore hope in the glory of God that we'll be saved from the wrath to come in the great day of judgment, that we'll be saved, he says, in his life, sharing at last in that eternal bodily life when he who raised Jesus from the dead will also give life to our mortal bodies.

So you see, friends, the story's still not over yet, not even for us. There's still more to come. This, this being Christians here, with all the joy and the wonder it brings to us, this is not as good as it gets.

No, no, no, the best, by far the best, is still to be when our king comes at last to reign. We too are saved in hope, aren't we?

Just like Jacob was. The same hope. And yet, yet a better hope, says the New Testament, a better hope because Christ the Savior has come. And we don't just look forward to the promise of his coming, but we also have that wonderful joy of looking back upon everything that he has already accomplished through his death for our sins and through his resurrection that assures us, assures us of life eternal.

And we can look back all the way back and trace that story of a great, great Savior right from the very beginning, from these first glimmerings in Genesis. But we can trace it to the fullest glory in the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospels.

[42 : 53] And so we have a hope that is even better. It is sure. It is utterly certain. past performance is the absolute guarantee of a future inheritance of glory as God has promised.

The story is not over yet, but the final chapter has been written. Indeed, it was written before Jacob was born. It was written before the world was formed, says Paul the Apostle.

And nothing can ever stop the wonderful underfunding of that story according to God's plan. Nothing. Not Jacob's sin and folly.

Not his family's dysfunction and disaster. Not Israel's rebellion and failure. And certainly not yours and mine.

nor can any of the arrows and the attacks of the evil one who would love, love to snatch you out of his hand. No.

[43 : 59] He is El Shaddai. He's the all sufficient one. None. None shall ever snatch out of his mighty hand of self-keeping, says Jesus himself. So friends, you and I, we are going to face and will face many struggles, many sorrowings.

All through our journey of life. Just like Jacob did. We too will know beauty and will know bereavement. And we'll still often worship, but we will also often weep, won't we?

Weeping at all sorts of things. The reminders of sin in our own lives and hearts. Weeping at the misery of death and bereavement. But soon a day is coming when this chapter of the story will at last be over.

Forever. And then, as C.S. Lewis puts it so wonderfully in the last line of the last book of Narnia, then we'll begin chapter one of the great story, which goes on forever.

And in which every chapter, every chapter is better than the one before. And in this hope, in the hope of Israel, we are safe forever and ever.

[45 : 29] Amen. We pray in the words of Jeremiah the prophet, O Lord, the hope of Israel, the fountain of living water.

Heal us, O Lord, and we shall be healed. Save us, and we shall be saved. For you are our praise. Keep us according to your promise.

Keep us indeed, O Lord, in this great hope. For our Lord Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.